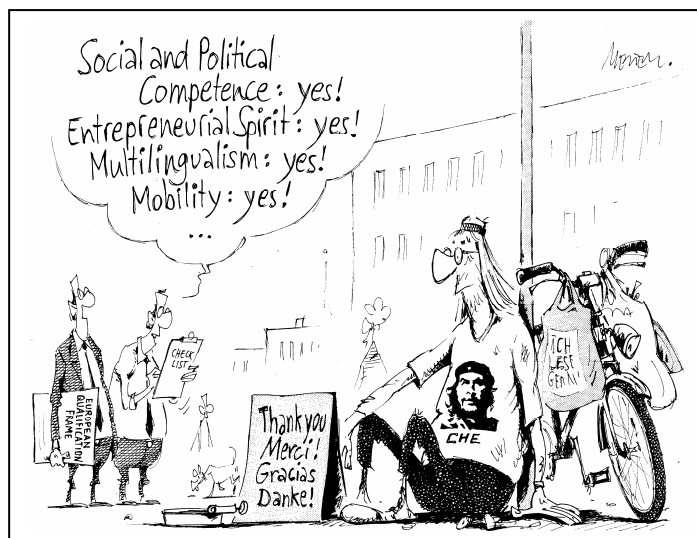


Topic: Best stories. In this edition, InfoNet is delving into its archive and presenting reports and accounts, mainly from the beginnings of the project, which describe illustrative aspects and stories. Once again it becomes clear how varied and interesting adult education is in the different countries of Europe (see page 4). This InfoLetter has been published for two years now, initially only for internal distribution within the network, and, since last year, in its new design, for everyone to read. Furthermore, there is a current interview and other current reports on matters of importance during the last two months.

European Qualifications Framework
Cartoon: Mester



A universal human right

Europe. Excerpts from the interview with Prof. Heribert Hinzen, director of the dvv international – the Institute for International Cooperation at the German Adult Education Association (DVV) – which, with its roughly 140 employees, is committed to the development of adult education, above all in the countries of eastern Europe and the poor countries of the world. The institute is based in Bonn (Germany).

(Michael Sommer) In Europe, the dvv international is particularly committed to central and eastern European countries. How is adult education developing there?

All in all we have a very positive feeling about the development of adult education in most of these countries. No doubt, we see a difference, and often fast changes in the new member countries of the EU, compared with those which are not, or not yet member countries. Not only are members fully involved in the political and economic transformation, but all EU policies and programmes in the field of adult education and training have a bearing on their developments. If you take the area of policy, legislation, and financing for adult education, then you have several countries with new adult learning policies and with new legislation, and in some even the level of financial support has grown.

It seems to be different when we look at Russia, Ukraine or Belarus. Here our partners inform us that the support by Government is not really coming forward in such a way that adult education could play a significant role in both dimensions: citizenship and employability.

How would you judge the importance of the European educational policy for these countries?

There can be no doubt that the European policies on education and training have a strong bearing on developments in the member countries. And we should not be surprised about it. Whereas the European policy on lifelong learning was developed at a time of the smaller EU before the last twelve joined in and after 2004, the new policy on “Adult Learning: It is Never too Late to Learn”, and the subsequent Action Plan on “It is Always a Good Time to Learn” was developed with full membership and involvement in the process.

What results can adult education achieve in the poor countries of the world, which are an important field of work for the DVV international?

Education is a universal human right; this includes adult education and learning. Kofi Anan once stated that literacy is a human right, and we are currently in the midst of the UN Literacy Decade and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. And all of this is well placed within a concept of lifelong learning. Today, nobody claims that there should be basic education for the South and lifelong learning for the North. Policy makers argue that education is a basic need as well as a prerequisite for development. How can you expect people to participate fully and get involved in development processes when their educational needs are denied? ▶

Full story in database

Heribert Hinzen



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European
InfoNet
Grundtvig Project Adult Education

CONTENT

Current reports:

The European Qualifications Framework: Skills for Europe
Page 2

Reading boom in Lithuania?
Page 2

France cuts down on accessibility to unemployment benefits and seeks support models for the unemployed
Page 3

Best stories

Swedish folkhögskola: A journey through life
Page 4

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EUROPEAN
AFFAIRS

The European Qualifications Framework: Skills for Europe

Swedish proposal for a Europe-wide skills promotion

Europe/Sweden. "We are going to need a Europe-wide skills promotion initiative on the Swedish model if we are going to meet the EU's skills target" claims the Folkbildningsförbundet, (Swedish National Federation of Study Associations), which is the umbrella organisation for study associations in Sweden. ▶

Education and training systems in the EU improve slowly but steadily

Europe. The latest figures on the performance of education and training systems across Europe indicate that there is some progress towards the ambitious goals EU Member States have set themselves under the Lisbon Strategy. ▶

1st World Forum On Lifelong Learning

Europe. The objective of this event (OCTOBER 28 & 29 2008, Paris) is to take stock of education and training throughout life, twelve years after the Delors report of April 1996 "Education, the Treasure Within", advances in the systems of education, training and learning throughout life in all its forms, as well as the innovative practices developed in all parts of the world. ▶

Evaluation finds Europass is good value for money

Europe. The European Commission has presented a report evaluating Europass. Thereport is based on an external evaluation which concludes that Europass is achieving its objectives as a cost-efficient mobility tool for citizens, and that the service it offers is relevant to their needs. ▶

Europe. *With the many papers it has published over past years, the European Union is going through a remarkable process of change. The new European Qualifications Framework (EQF) means that attention is increasingly being drawn to terms such as "competencies", "skills" and "key qualifications": elements which can be taught to a great extent by general adult education. The individual countries are currently working on implementing the EQF.*

(Michael Sommer) While in the Lisbon Strategy of 2000 (still relevant today) the main focus was on questions of employability, today it includes people as a whole, in their social environment. One prominent key element is the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The aim of this framework of reference is to make acquired skills easier to compare and more transparent at a European level, thus enabling greater mobility. The EQF acts as a "translation grid" between national systems of qualification. To this effect, independently of formal education qualifications, it only studies learning outcomes – the knowledge, abilities and skills striven for and acquired by the end of a learning process. It takes in all sectors of education and qualification, such as training and further or higher education. The EQF is to take on the function of a super ordinate "meta-framework" which will help connect different qualifications frameworks at national and sectoral level. The skills acquired on a course of education must therefore first be fitted into the levels of a national reference system.

As well as the knowledge and abilities acquired, eight further key qualifications are listed:

- communication in the mother tongue
- communication in foreign languages
- mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology: the mastery, use and application of knowledge and methodologies which explain the natural world. These involve an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and the responsibility of each individual as a citizen.
- digital competence
- learning to learn
- social and civic competencies: personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life. "An understanding of codes of conduct and customs in the different environments in which individuals operate is essential. Civic competence, and particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights) equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation".
- sense of initiative and entrepreneurship: the ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. This should include awareness of ethical values and promoting good governance.

• cultural awareness and expression: this involves appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media (music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts).

Even though important elements such as the family, morals or values are not included, this framework of reference nonetheless contains terms and phrases familiar to German adult educators.

Implementation process

The separate member countries are now engaged in implementing the aims of the EQF in National Qualifications Frameworks. The first conference has taken place (on 3rd and 4th June 2008) on the subject of the European Qualifications Framework and how it can be put into practice. Roughly 230 stakeholders from the member states held discussions in Brussels about the best way to implement the European Qualifications Framework. The different countries are implementing the EQF aims at different speeds: The recognition of non-formal and informal learning has already been implemented particularly in the National Qualifications Frameworks of Ireland and France. As well as questions of competencies, in many countries, in order to compile National Qualifications Frameworks, obstacles are still being surmounted between the different sectors and forms of education, and access to training and education is being discussed, as is the interchangeability of elements in their education systems.

In some countries, the EQF aims have already led to intensive discussion on reforming their education systems. Denmark, for example, has set up a working group to prepare for implementation. The main question in this respect is how to place greater weight on what is to be taught, rather than on formal qualifications. However, unions and industrial associations in Denmark fear that there will be less flexibility if a national version of the EQF is introduced. In Germany, a commission composed of representatives from the Federal government and the Länder is working on the implementation; here, among other things, critics fear that the federal independence of the Länder will be lost. ▶

Reading boom in Lithuania?

Lithuania. (Ricardas Totoraitis) During the period of 2006- 2007 the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania implemented the project funded by the European Social Fund. During the said project a series of literature on Adult Education was published. The outcome of the project was the publication of 18 andragogical books of literature, with a circulation of more than 32 thousand copies. This is the largest publication project in the sphere of education, conducted during the recent years in Lithuania. ▶

... ▶

France cuts down on accessibility to unemployment benefits and seeks support models for the unemploy

France. *The report "Together towards employment" by the Secretary of State Éric Besson compares the German, Danish and British provisions for labour integration. It makes early and durable polyvalent integration necessary and requires "short and qualifying" training. A report, incidentally, that was presented a week before voting on a law restricting access to benefits by the unemployed.*

(Renée David Aschlimann) Even if mass unemployment in European Union countries is going down (6.8% in May 2008 compared to 7.2% in May 2007), it still remains a "hard nut" to crack for people who have been out of work long term due not only to a lack of suitable skills and qualifications but also to a lack of appropriate support. It is precisely what needs to be done in order to crack this hard nut that is the task given to Eric Besson, French Secretary of State for Public Policies. On the 16th of July just gone, he presented his comparative analysis of the vocational integration provisions for this section of the public in Germany, Denmark and the United Kingdom.

The report comes in favour of "early, regular and ongoing support" for job-seekers. It cites the case of Germany, where the employed are required to give notification of their dismissal/redundancy to the employment agencies, before the end of their contract. According to Eric Besson, the unemployed should have access to a « special window » where they can find different services on offer (finding employment, benefits, social aids and access to basic or qualifying training). A place such as the British Job Centre which is the best role model, must be able to deal with anybody that is unemployed, whatever their status regarding benefits.

Reduction in public spending

The Secretary of State also suggests "combining the services" on offer to job-seekers, over and above just the simple searching for a job: something that will help with orientation, subsidised work, work experience in industry, health services, etc. These consist of qualifying training that is, advisedly, qualified as "brief", in the report. At present, and rather paradoxically, it is those who are the furthest away from being employed who have the most difficulty obtaining funding for qualifying training that would help them to bounce back! This situation can be attributed directly to the fact that adult vocational training comes under the Social Services partners who manage funds intended for people already in employment. The reduction - no-one would call it an "optimisation" - in public spending on the fight for greater employment, constitutes the second priority, if not the first. The comparative analysis of the vocational integration provisions in the three countries mentioned, show up a common trend, over the last decade, in the tightening up of conditions for the claiming of unemployment benefit, with smaller

payments and for shorter periods. In this way, Denmark lowered the total duration for unemployment benefit from seven years in 1994, down to four years in 1999. In Germany, the "Hartz IV" reform of 2005 led to a revising downwards of social assistance and unemployment benefit. Tighter control of those involved increased in all three countries.

Example UK

In the UK, for example, an unemployed person has to present himself/herself within fifteen days of the date he/she becomes unemployed, for a short interview, otherwise his/her payments are suspended. Progressive financial sanctions are also envisaged in Germany if the unemployed person does not participate in the training courses offered, or else refuses the offer of a « suitable job ». In Denmark, the person seeking employment is obliged to write four application letters per week and to accept any job that he/she "can start in immediately, or after training": otherwise there is a risk of having the unemployment benefit suspended. France has also embarked on this process. In fact, a week after the Besson report was delivered, the law on the "rights and responsibilities of job-seekers" was voted into law, which proposes "a personal application procedure for employment", whilst, at the same time, setting down the possibility of someone being struck off the list of unemployed if he/she should turn down two "reasonable job offers" at the end of three months.

French employee unions rejected law

The law that penalised people participating in qualifying retraining programmes has had an amendment proposed to it by the Green deputy, Martine Billard, which was unanimously voted in. However, all the French employee unions have rejected this law unanimously. Whilst awaiting the restructuring of the public employment services that is currently going on, the unemployed do not yet know what training they could expect: lengthy training courses that would make vocational retraining a real matter, or short ones so as to adapt to any kind of job? The answer to this question is dependent on the funding of the training courses, also being discussed at the moment within the framework of long term training reform envisaged for the beginning of 2009 and on renegotiating the agreement on unemployment insurance.

EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Further news:

European Awards for Lifelong Learning recognise outstanding mobility projects

Annual report on the education systems in the EU: Fewer than 10% of adults in Europe take part in lifelong learning activities.

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

UK: More than 2.25 million adults achieve first qualifications in basic skills

An ambitious target for 2.25 million people to achieve their first national qualification in basic skills such as reading and writing has been achieved two years early.

Austria: Innovative educational projects presented with award
Innovation award presented by the Forum for Catholic Adult Education in Austria.

Science

Interculturality and dialogue

The idea that a culture is a sort of island primarily related to itself, definable and thus delimitable, is a nineteenth-century construct. One very dramatic consequence of this idea is the process described as keeping a culture pure, which can only be thought out and put into practice by following the path of exclusion and force. In actual fact, cultures are and have always been constantly engaged in mutual exchange, in an alternating pattern of absorption and delimitation, and cannot adequately be understood as polarities.

Best stories

Swedish folkhögskola: A journey through life

Education against the right-wing

Germany. The EU report “European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia” shows a shocking increase in right-wing trends in Germany. Political education (citizenship education) is trying to counter this with projects. ▶

Discrimination “Made in Italy”

Italy. People can be victims of discrimination for political, religious, sexual, racial or psycho-physical reasons. In Italy, however, people are often discriminated against purely because they do not have the right sort of “contacts” (friends, influential people, politicians) or even because they do not have a so-called “recommendation”. This is a form of discrimination which is hidden and unrecognised, and thus not addressed. ▶

Finland: Cultural consciousness as an aid to adjustment

Finnland. A sense of self-esteem that develops in childhood and an awareness of different cultures help people cope with the most extreme forms of cultural upheaval. This is the conclusion reached by Aimo Aikio, researcher at the University of Lapland, who interviewed members of the Nordic minority, Sámi, who have achieved success in life. ▶

People’s Universities in Poland

Educating adults in Poland has long been associated with the so-called university movement whose aim was to disseminate knowledge with particular consideration given to education and upbringing, social policy, national culture and environmental protection. People’s universities, became part of our modern day approach thanks to their rich tradition. ▶

Sweden. *Studying at a Swedish residential adult education centre (folkhögskola) is frequently compared to a journey through life. A travelling experience where the journey is just as important as the reaching the destination, a process of acquiring knowledge with fundamental human, social and political dimensions. The residential adult education centre is the creation of every single student and teacher; every individual is a resource.*

(Hetty Rooth) Swedish residential adult education centres traditionally offer a freer and educationally more creative environment than other types of school. The idea is for it to be a space for development, and not just an educational establishment. The difference between Swedish residential adult education centres and the normal school system is rooted in history. The adult education centres are a force for democracy, with a broad base consisting of voluntary organisations and political movements.

Sweden currently has 148 residential adult education centres all over the country, representing an integral part of Swedish adult education. The majority of residential adult education centres are organisation or movement-based and are run, for instance, by study associations or professional associations. 43 of the schools, however, have no affiliation to any organisation, but have links with the local authorities and regions.

Fill gaps in knowledge from secondary school

What is different about the adult education centres? Students do not normally need any certificates to enrol at a residential adult education centre so the courses are normally pitched at different levels to reflect individual abilities. Many young adults currently attend an adult education centre to fill gaps in their knowledge from secondary school or to acquire sixth form qualifications to enable them to apply for higher education. Courses like this are known as general courses and last for one academic year. The residential adult education centres do not, however, award the same type of certificates as the normal schools, but instead use a final assessment which can be compared all over the country. Apart from the general courses, the residential adult education centres organise many individual, shorter and longer courses in various subjects, for example foreign affairs, textile skills or creative writing, as well as various types of vocational training.

Nearly all the adult training centres in Sweden offer both day and residential courses. Living together at school and socialising outside school hours is still considered to be part of the educational and social environment of the residential adult education centres today. This is a throwback, so to speak, from the historical early beginnings of the adult education centre when it was also a place for social gathering, ideological discussion and fundamental democratic training.

Peasant movement

The adult education centres emerged from the political and economic reforms that took place in Sweden during the 1860’s. At that time, Sweden

was a country of 4 million inhabitants, 90 percent of which lived in the countryside. The reforms, which were to be of great significance for the country’s development, gave the local authorities a greater degree of autonomy and the peasant freeholders gained more influence.

But many peasants lacked the knowledge they would need to exercise their power. Peasant children did not go through the secondary school system and rarely had the opportunity of further education.

The first “peasant schools” or residential adult education centres were started in 1862 through a private initiative, taking their inspiration from Norway and Denmark.

Over the next 25 years as Sweden underwent profound changes, with population increases on the one hand and migration from the countryside on the other, about 30 adult education centres were established, mainly in rural areas in southern and central Sweden.

The peasant schools therefore grew out of the emerging need for popular education, combined with a redistribution of power in society. Ideologically they were driven by patriotism and regional affiliation, but they were also religiously and politically independent. During this early period, the schools, in spite of their popular roots, were seen more as teaching schools for general education than the democratic form of education, which has since come to be known as adult education.

Studying today

Studying at a residential adult education centre nowadays is free of charge, but students normally have to pay for course literature and students on the residential courses pay for food and accommodation.

The idea of residential education, which was for a long time part of the overall educational concept of the adult education centre, has been diluted over the years, not least because of the lack of interest on the part of the students.

Once the residential adult education centres were full of young people, keen for knowledge, who were being given the opportunity to acquire the education they so desperately sought. Nowadays the student mix has changed somewhat. The residential adult education centre still provides a unique environment where the potential of every student is nurtured. But at the same time the task of the adult education centres can often be more difficult that it was before.

One of the challenges nowadays on the general courses is to motivate students who have lost interest in education, whose self-confidence has been destroyed during their compulsory schooling. When the adult education centre is successful it can help to break the destructive cycle, kindle the desire for knowledge and contribute towards democracy and equality. Residential adult education centres are perhaps needed more than ever in today’s society where a new type of exclusion mechanism also creates new social divisions.

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